Sadanira

Dr. Hari Mohan Mishra

Sadānīrā, the name of a river, first occurs in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (1.3.3.14-17) in connection with the story of a certain Māthava videgha. The story tells us that Agni vaiśvānara followed by Māthava videgha and his priest Gotama Rahūgaṇa, travelling all along from the bank of the river Sarasvatī came to the river Sadānīrā. The story explicitly mentions that the river Sadānīrā formed the boundary between Kosala and Videha and says further that the people living in the east to that river were known as Māthavas.

'सैषाप्येतर्हि कोसलविदेहानां मर्यादा ते हि माथवाः ।'
(Ibid)

The motivating idea behind the story appears to be to explain the etymologies of Videha and Mithilā. As the river Sadānīrā formed the boundary between Kosala and Videha, it can be identified only with the three rivers, namely, Sarayū, Rāpti and Gaṇḍakī. As Sarayū is very close to Ayodhyā, capital of Kosala, only the rest two remain to be considered. Eggeling (S.B.E. XII, p. 104) identified Sadānīrā with Gaṇḍakī. Weber does the same (Indische Stūdien, I, pp. 172, 181). Several other scholars also hold the same view. But Oldenberg (Buddha : His life, His doctrine, His order, p. 398) and Pargiter (Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, p. 294) identified Sadānīrā with Rāptī. That the river Sadānīrā was actually Rāptī will be clear from the following di cussions. Before the proposed discussion is taken up the case of one more river for identification should be disposed of. In Amarakośa where some river-names are given, the following verse occurs—

'करतोया सदानीरा' (1.10.32).

This verse may be interpreted in two ways. Either they are two independent rivers or they are names of the same river. It is the second interpretation which commentators of Amarakośa have followed. On this basis Sadānīrā was identified with Karatoyā (Imperial Gazetteer, vol. 15, p. 24). As the river Sadānīrā was the boundary between Kosala and Videha it cannot be identified with Karatoyā, the river of North Bengal.

Before the Aryan penetration into India, the country was inhabited by the people who spoke Austric and Dravidian speeches. In the Himalayan tracts as well as in the eastern regions of India Tibeto-Burman speaking people had also settled. Naturally a large number of territories, hills, forests, rivers, and flora and fauna had their native names. New Indo-Aryan names came with the Aryans but a large number of old names continued simply because the Aryans had not ready made words with them for unfamiliar things found in a vast country like India of varying climates. A number of these non-Aryan names were Sanskritised while a few others which were translated into Sanskrit remained in use along with the translated ones and became their synonyms in course of time.

Sadānīrā is an explanatory word and as such is distinct among other river-names of the region, e.g. Sarayū, Bāhukā, Rohiṇī, Guṇḍakī and Kauśikī etc. It is a compound of two words sadā = always and nīrā = water, the first being a Sanskrit and the second originally a Dravidian word. Thus the compound word Sadānīrā literally means, full of water. Sanskrit sadānīrā appears to be a literal translation of the original non-Aryan name of a river. It can not be Gaṇḍakī as it probably means a river whose water produces tumour in the throat which happens even now. Sadānīrā is most probably Rāptī in which 'ti' appears to be a Tibeto-Burman word which means water or river. Alexander Cunningham in his Archaeological Survey of India (vol. XIV, 125) suggested that Tibeto-Burma 'Ti' occurs in a number of river names in the Trans-Satlaj areas, e.g. Rāwa-ti = Rāvi, Nyung-ti = Beas, Zang-ti = Satlaj, Pāra-ti = Para river. According to Cunningham, it is the Tibeto-Burma 'ti' which has been Sanskritized in several names of rivers, e.g. Irāva-ti (and not Irā-vati), Goma-ti (and not Go-mati). Dr. S. K. Chatterji (Kirāta jana kṛti, p. 43) does not accept this explanation in toto. However, he concedes that there are really a number of river-names where Tibeto-Burma 'ti' may be accepted as the second constituent. Names like Dṛṣadvatī and Gomatī etc. should be considered as Sanskrit words because basal and suffixal parts in them are quite clear. But names Rāptī, Tāptī, Kāmti etc. may be entirely Tibeto-Burman words or combinations of Austric and Tibeto-Burman word. The first part of Rāptī in not clear but it may have meant what is

meant by Sanskrit sadā (= always). Thus the identification of Sadānīrā with Rāptī appears to be reasonable on linguistic grounds. This is corroborated by other evidences as well.

A verse in the Mahābhārata comes in handy as it makes distinction between Sadānīrā and Gaṇḍakī :—

गण्डकी च महाशोणं सदानीरा तथैव च ।
एक पर्वतके नद्यः क्रमेणैत्याव्रजन्त ते ॥

(2.20.27)

This verse was cited by Oldenberg in support of identification of Sadānīrā with Rāptī.

There are two rivers known as Rāptī—(1) main Rāptī (western) and Būrhi Rāptī (the eastern) or Dhumelā (< Dhavalā) also known as Bāhukā or Bāhudā. In Buddhist literature the main Rāptī is known as Aciravatī (Dīghanikāya, 1. p. 206) or Ajiravatī (Avadānaśataka 1.63). According to the Buddhist literature the Rāptī is one of the five great rivers of India along with the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarabhū (i.e. Sarayū) and Mahī. The river was notorious for its devastating floods. It is said that in one of its floods Viḍūḍabha and his army were swept into the sea (Dhammapadaṭṭhā Kathā, 1.360), Destructions of crops have also been referred to :—

'सब्बं सस्सं समुद्दं पवेसेति'

(Jātaka, Fausboll's Ed. 4. p. 167)

It is very difficult to pinpoint the place where Māthava Videgha may have crossed the river but it must have been a place along the well-known route.

According to the story as told in ŚBr. Māthava Videgha started his expedition from the bank of the river Sarasvatī. It is inconceivable that Māthava Videgha started from the bank of the river Sarasvatī for the pilgrimage of the land later named after him leaving all the territories inhabited by the unconquered non-Aryan enemies. The Aryanisation of Videha must have been preceded by the Aryanisation of Kośala. Māthava Videgha must have been a leader of an advance party of the Kośalan Aryans. Advance Party may have been, say, one thousand strong or even more than that. What was the route the party followed ? The southern route or the route by the left bank of the Ganges may have been difficult in crossing the various great rivers.

Besides, this route will be circuitous for the founder of the city of Mithilā. The party may have followed the northern route. In the time of the Buddha the highway which connected Śrāvasti and Rājagṛha passed through Setavyā, Kapilavastu, Kusinārā, Bhoganagara and Vaiśālī. Another highway conncted Śrāvasti with Takṣaśilā.

It appears from the above discussions that the territories east to the river Rāpti were Videha in ancient times. In the MBH the word gaṇḍaka in pl. signifies those Videhans who lived on the bank of river Gaṇḍakī :—

'ततः स गण्डकाञ्छूरो विदेहान् भरतर्षभः ।
विजित्याल्पेन कालेन दशार्णानजयत्प्रभुः ॥'
(2.29.5)

There are only two possible interpretations of the word Gaṇḍaka here. It may be an independent noun or it may qualify Videha. The second meaning is preferable as Gaṇḍaka does not occur elsewhere as an independent noun signifying a people. Thus 'Gaṇḍaka videha' means 'videha people living on the banks of the river Gaṇḍakī'. Monier Williams (Skt.-English Dictionary) also gives the same meaning. It is reasonable to suppose that videhas lived on both sides of the river and not only on the eastern side.

In the MBH (6.6.12-13) the following four dvīpas are mentioned :—

1. Kuru or Uttarakuru in the north;
2. Jambu or Bhārata in the south;
3. Bhadrāśva in the east, and
4. Ketumāla in the west.

In the Buddhist literature the third, that is, Bhadrāśva and the fourth, that is Ketumāla have been substituted by pūrvavideha and apara Godāna or Goyāna respectively. Explaining the new term "pūrva videha" D. C. Sircar observes,—"The name 'pūrva videha' would mean 'eastern videha' or more probably, 'videha' in the east. It may be that the Buddhists preferred that name because the Buddha's birth place which is one of the four greatest Buddhist tīrthas was situated in the ancient videha country in eastern India" (Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India, p. 19). It means that territories around Kapilavastu were once known as videha whatever may

be the interpretation of the term 'pūrva videha'. One more suitable meaning of 'pūrva' in 'pūrva videha' appears to be 'ancient'. It would mean that the land between the river Rāpti and the river Gaṇḍakī was once known as Videha.

In the time of the Buddha there were a number of republics in the territories east to the river Rāpti. The Buddha himself belonged to one of them. Some republics formed a confederacy which was known as Vajjian Confederacy. There is a controversy regarding the number of the confederates: whether they were eight or less than that. J. P. Sharma (Republic in Ancient India, p. 84) after discussing the matter at length gives the name of the following republics :—

"The Licchavis of Vesāli, the Videhas of Mithilā, the Nāyas of Kundapura, the Mallas of Pāvā and Kusinārā and the Vijjis."

It is really remarkable that the whole confederacy was known as Vajji although the Licchavis were the most powerful confederate of all of them. The word Vajji is no less mysterous than the word Videha. Both of them deserve special treatment and they will be discussed in an independent paper. That the Licchavis and the Nāyas were known as Videhas is clear from the Pali texts. This is also corroborated by the Jain text. The following statement occurs in one of the Jain texts :—

"In that period in that age the venerable ascetic Mahāvīra a Jñātṛ kṣatriya, Jñātṛ-putra, a videha, son of Videhadattā, a native of videha, a prince of videha, lived thirty years among the householders under the name of videha."

(Ācārāṅga Sūtra, 2. 15-17, Eng. tr. in S.B.E. XXII)

There is a controversy regarding the status of the Śākyas : whether they were under the king of Kośala or they formed an independent republic. According to Malalasekera the Śākyan territory in 600 B. C. was under the Kośalan king (Dictionary of Pali Proper Names). This has been supported by a number of scholars, e. g.. K. P. Jayaswal (Hindu Polity, p. 43), H. C. Raychaudhari (Political History of Ancient India, p. 43) and V. Pathak (History of Kośala, pp. 39-40). The claim has been refuted by Rhys Davids

(Buddhist India, pp. 17–21), R. C. Mazumdar (Corporate Life in Ancient India, p. 235) and J. P. Sharma (Republis in Ancient India, pp. 182–186). There are really contradictory statements which have only confused the issue. The following address of the kind Prasenajit to the Buddha shows, that the Buddha was a Kośalan :—

'भगवाऽपि कोसलको अहम्पि कोसलको ।'

(Majjhima Nikāya II, p. 124)

But the statement—''ततो अविदूरे विडूडभस्स रज्ज सिमाय' (Jātaka, IV, p. 152) shows equally that the Śākya territory just touched the border but was outside the jurisdiction of the Kośalan kingdom. The conclusion drawn by J. P. Sharma after weighing the arguments of both sides appears to be reasonable. He says :—

"That the Śākyas were extinguished as a political power by Viḍūḍabha and that the survivors may have become Kośalans at a later time seems certain, but the source appears to have intermingled earlier and later events. The passages cited above impel us to suggest that the Śakyas were an independent political community during the Pasendi's reign and the earlier part of Viḍūḍabha."

(Republics in Ancient India, p. 186)

One more significant point is the absence of the Kośalan king in the time of the death of the Buddha at Kusīnārā when almost all the neighbouring states claimed their shares in the relics. The claimants were–king Ajātaśatru of Magadha, the Licchavis, the Śākyas of Kapilavastu, the Bulis of Allakappa, the Koliyas of Rāmagāma, Brāhmaṇas of Veṭhṭhādīpa, Mallas of Kusinārā and Pāva (Dīgha Nikāya, II, 3.20, 111–115). The claim of the Śākyas was the upper most as the Buddha was the pride of the Śākyas (Nātisettho). The claim of all others except that of the Brāhmaṇas of Veṭhṭhādīpa, was based on the fact that all of them were khattiyas and the deceased was also a khattiya. Besides being a khattiya, Ajātaśatru was also related to the Videhans on his mother's side as he was known as Videhiputto. The Nāyas and the Videhas probably were represented by the Licchavis. But the absence of the Kosalan king probably shows that he was not related to tribes to which the Buddha belonged.

There are striking similarities between the political institutions of the Licchavis and that of the Śākyas. This is another proof which indicates that they were originally one.

All this shows that at the time of the Buddha almost all republic states east to the river Rāpti had many things in common among them and that they were generally known as Videhas.

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY
L. N. MISHRA COMMEMORATION VOLUME

Vols. LXIII-LXIV **1977-1978**

Chief Editor
Professor Upendra Thakur

Editor-in-Charge
Dr. K. K. Mandal



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY
PATNA